

Western MRS Meeting Notes  
July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008  
St. John's Episcopal Church Asheville

Counties Present: Buncombe, Caldwell, Gaston, Henderson, Macon, McDowell, Polk, Transylvania.

Introductions

Announcements – Children's Services

Shared Parenting

CFT Policy

CFT Observations

Moving Forward with MRS

Announcements

- MRS Institute!! Don't forget! Note - presenters will not count in your guaranteed three participants.
- JoAnn has announced her retirement effective November.
- Passed our IVE review.

Shared Parenting

Rick Zechman presented on this. The only thing that has really been in policy around Shared Parenting was that you must have a meeting within 7 days. Wanted to flesh that out and include more information around Shared Parenting. Have been talking to trainers, foster care, licensing, and policy consultants. Wanted to get some information from this group about where you would like specific guidance.

- Want to provide some guidance around starting to have conversations with parents when it looks like a possibility that children will come into care.
- Want to acknowledge that children may want to maintain a relationship with the foster parents post permanency. This is ok, but need to plan for this from the get-go.

Comments

- The 7 days is hard because it is so soon after the children have been removed the biological parents are so angry they won't talk to DSS so social workers don't feel that they will talk to the people that have custody of their children.
  - At one time we talked about pushing this out but some counties said please not to do this because thinking about it from the other side, that would be more than a week that the birth parents don't have any idea who has their children and that the foster parents may not know important things about the children in their care.
  - One county started having them at the time of placement. Yes, there was resentment toward the DSS but the birth parents were more willing to talk to the foster parents and this allowed them to calm down some because they at least knew where their children were going.
  - One county has them after the day one conference.

- One county has said that when they do them within 7 days it is beneficial if the removal social worker is NOT the one that is there. If there will be a new foster care social worker, this may be a good time to introduce her. However some counties can't do this because they are so small that it is the same worker – but maybe there could be another worker there (anyone else – Work First, or anyone) to help ease the tension.
- Preparation is the key, for both the biological parents and the foster parents.
- After the preparation, DSS's role should be somewhat small. If the meetings are going well, we as DSS need to kind of back off and let the biological parents be angry with DSS and not get in the middle so that the anger won't be transferred to the foster parents.
- McDowell has a form to go by as a guideline to make sure that they cover everything.
- What about involvement of any other relatives? Do counties do this, consider it, why or why not?
  - An advantage of doing it at the day one conference is that they ask the birth parents to bring any other relatives that would be possible placements.
  - Concern that the Shared Parenting meeting is about building a relationship between the birth and foster parents and if the birth parents have relatives there that they already have a relationship with they might be more reluctant to begin building a new relationship with the foster parents. The county that does involve relatives has not noticed an issue.
  - A lot of times counties have had more success getting information about the children from the relatives than the birth parents. The parents may not realize that sharing this is for the benefit of the children and can't get around their issues with DSS but the relatives will share information with DSS or foster parents.
  - There are other ways to involve relatives, such as a CFT, other than a Shared Parenting meeting.
  - One county involves them if the relatives have been care providers or they are the alternate placement.
- Have to keep in mind: What is the goal of a Shared Parenting meeting? There should be a distinct difference between a CFT and a Shared Parenting meeting. A Shared Parenting meeting is about building a relationship, and a CFT is about developing a plan.
- If you are doing true concurrent planning and another relative is the secondary plan it might make sense to involve them, but be sure it doesn't turn into a 'competition' between the relatives to see who will get custody.
- Absent or non-custodial parents – anyone having any success or challenge involving them?

- Better luck involving them if the visits with the father are separate than the ones with the mother, and also better for the birth father if the foster father is at the meeting.
- Still having foster parents that have the traditional concerns regarding Shared Parenting – don't want to have much of a relationship with the biological parents. But they can't turn these folks down as foster parents because they need them so much.
  - Don't have to share every little thing about the foster families – don't have to give out phone numbers and addresses, although especially in small towns these are easy to find, but Shared Parenting allows you to plan for this instead of freaking out when you unexpectedly see them in the Wal-Mart.
  - Foster parents sometimes get so wrapped up in the 'meeting' the birth parents part. Don't let this overwhelm them, and point out to them that there are many other aspects of SP, many of which they are probably doing (letters in the diaper bag, sending pictures of the children, etc.)
- Suggestion: At an MRS meeting have some birth and foster parents here.
- Is there a video resource? Small counties may not have a foster parent that felt that Shared Parenting is successful, but if we could make a video with a foster parent that would hit home to reluctant foster parents more so than the DSS social worker talking about stuff.
- How do counties prepare for post permanency?
  - When you have a youth who is going to age out and you know that he plans to go back to the birth mom, even though you think it is a bad situation, it is not doing the youth any favors to ignore this. Go ahead and let the youth know what his resources are if he goes home and xyz happens. Don't cut off all contact with the birth family because they will sneak out, run away, etc to contact them. Help them to learn to make good decisions.
- Shared Parenting does not apply to group homes but it does apply to private Foster Home providers – these folks are reluctant to participate.
- Also have to look into yourself – part of the challenges to implementing does not come from reluctance on the part of the foster parents, but is a less than positive attitude on the part of the social worker.
- Are there specific things that you want to be included in policy?
  - Wanted a copy of McDowell's form because sometimes you forget to mention something.
  - Think it would be good to have some guidance regarding post permanency but don't make it so strict that if mom has fallen off the face of the earth the agency doesn't spend a significant amount of resources trying to locate a mom who doesn't want to be located
  - If you have ideas and suggestions, email Rick (Eric.Zechman) or Holly with these ideas.

## CFT Policy

Policy should be on-line very soon – won't get a hard copy yet because there is so much new policy coming out.

- Families were involved in creating this definition.
- Matthew Jones and his mom speak on their experiences with CFTs. He was having mental health issues leading to troubles with school and he was not invested in CFTs but what made him decide to give it a try was that he was able to choose the location and he could bring a friend of his to the meeting. He also did not want the school to be there because he had to be there all day and he was sick of them. Even though the school was where he was having issues, they let him not invite them to the first meeting, and after the first one, he was convinced it would help to have them there. It also came out at the meeting that his dream was to have his own business. So they started talking to him about what would be needed to have his own business, a drivers license, and math skills, so he saw a investment in school on his own and both mental health and the school got their needs met without forcing themselves on the family.
- Definition - Child and Family Teams are family members and their community supports that come together to create, implement and update a plan *with* the child, youth and family. The plan builds on the strengths of the child, youth and family and addresses their needs, desires and dreams.
- CFT meetings in Assessment
  - Not required, unless a petition is going to be filed during assessment, and the child's safety is not compromised by the holding of a meeting
  - Can be used for safety planning
  - Special care needs to be taken to be clear with all participants, that while there is an ongoing assessment, in which much information will be gathered, this is not the purpose of this meeting
  - Initial preparation for CFT should always begin in Assessment
- CFT in In-Home Services
  - Whenever a Service Agreement is due
  - When the family requests one
  - Critical Decisions
  - *Prior to case closure for repeat recipients of In-Home Services*
  - Don't forget those collaterals!!
- Foster Care and Adoption
  - Any time a Service Agreement and/or a PPAT is due
  - At the family's request
  - Critical decisions (return home, placement change)
  - Should address concurrent plans
  - Will continue after reunification is ceased, team *may* change, but meetings should continue
  - For children whose parents are no longer involved, the child should be consulted as to who they see as their supports and these choices should be honored
- Combining CFT and PPAT (and others)

- The critical point here is the inclusion of GAL and Community Rep. Hold discussion with family to ascertain if they will agree to this.
  - We all know how precious time is; with a little planning and collaboration other meetings may be able to be rolled into a CFT.
- Preparation
  - Early and often
  - Prepare *all* participants
  - Developing team
  - Safety issues
  - Identifying non-negotiables
  - Time, place, cultural touches
  - Focus/goal of meeting
  - Ground rules
  - Absent parents
  - Mentor/support person
  - Involving children—Not an “if”, but a “how”
- Looking Inward
  - What are your personal feelings about the issues
  - How might they influence you
  - How can you assure that you leave them at the door
- Looking Outward
  - Building relationships with community partners
  - Developing informal resources
  - Educate partners
  - Ask for what you need!
- Special Considerations
  - DV cases
  - Older youth with no, or “hidden” family
- Facilitator
  - Must be used in High and Intensive risk cases
  - Not a part of the team—no opinion
  - May keep notes
  - May help with prep
- What's Important for documentation
  - Developing the team
  - Preparing all team members
  - Who was invited/who attended
  - Special features
  - Ideas of all team members
  - How one strategy was chosen over another
  - Child involvement
  - Absent parents
  - Culture
  - Not a checklist
- Training

### CFT Observations

Holly shared information from Nicole (Duke University). We were able to gain the use of a tool that Washington State is using. There will be a DCD letter going out to the 5 randomly selected counties that Duke will observe 10 CFTs using this tool. We will make the tool available to all counties and Nicole will do some training on the use of the tool (probably at this meeting in September).

### Moving Forward with MRS

This is nebulous to get your heads around. We have been statewide for about 2 years. There are still areas in each county where things could go deeper. May be following policy to the letter but not the spirit. How can we move forward?

- Continue to focus on the principles and practice in training. (Note that the Division does need to do this, but if what they learn in training is not reinforced in the county agency culture, workers will not retain and use what they learned in training.)
- Some kind of quick 'refresher shot' that could be forwarded to workers when they can't come to training. Like the MRS newsletter but shorter.
- AFI has been doing a blog type thing to follow up on training.
- There is a facilitator forum that is run by NC State that anyone can participate in.
- Billy West comes up with a 1 page thing once a week that talks about some real life situation that happened, could see if we can forward those out. They are uplifting and demonstrate an opportunity to implement best practice.
- Something to help with what the role of licensing worker and foster parents should be in CFTs.
- What if we could not have this meeting anymore? What if travel restrictions come about or the counties just cannot afford it, what would work?
  - Although there are computer options some counties do not have the capability.
  - Conference calls would be a possibility.
  - Having a call in number at this meeting not very useful because the people on the phone can only hear one or two people at the meeting and they may say stuff that someone at the back of the room already said, and it just doesn't work well.
- Counties said they really hoped that we would not discontinue this meeting. Even if some counties can't come some times, they come in general and the meetings are useful.

### Other items for discussion/comment

- Having trouble getting foster parents co-trained to lead MAPP because most people can't take off 3 weeks from work.
- A lot of policy changes lately and people are concerned that they might have overlooked one.

### September Meetings:

Central: Orange County – September 17<sup>th</sup>  
Western: AB Tech September date TBA  
Eastern: Onslow – September 30<sup>th</sup>